

sion of colonies which have grown too large for their own good. Dr. Stephenson claims to have identified a correlation between the baptismal and the fission cycle whereby, in agreement with the collectivist ethos, the former is determined by the latter. This implies that candidates for baptism are dependent in their quest for individual (ritual) rebirth on the achievement of collective rebirth through the splitting up of their colony, and thus the satisfaction of the social needs of its members.

Unfortunately, this interesting argument does not come across very well. Dr. Stephenson proves in one clearly and warmly written "people chapter" (chap. 4) that he knows what constitutes good prose. But this is undone in the bulk of the text which is marred by excessively technical language. The model chosen to explain the role of ritual in the Hutterian culture, described as a combination of "systems perspective" with "cybernetics perspective," draws heavily on the natural sciences, and this does not help the clarity of the argument. Lost between graphs and diagrams, overshadowed by "holons," "equifinality," "self-simplification," "synergy" and *Forskalia tholoides*, the Hutterites themselves fade into the background, as if to underline the wisdom of the author's own warning that "numbers are the shadows which events cast, they are not the events themselves, nor should they play a part in the mystification of social life" (p. 202).

It is not for a reviewer to condemn an author for choosing a particular theoretical framework. But, in this case, where the theory does not help the reader, one wishes that Dr. Stephenson had tested some other anthropological approaches to ritual (and evolution) which have been employed since the mid-1970s, the period which seems to have engendered this particular model.

A Response to Scheffel

Respondent: Peter H. Stephenson
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In David Scheffel's review there are several comments to which I object. Scheffel suggests that I know how to write what he calls "good prose" illustrated by a "warmly written 'people chapter,'" but chides me for using graphs, diagrams and technical language in "the bulk of the text." That prose is characterized as "difficult," and Scheffel suggests the book is "marred" by it. Actually, until Chapter 5 (of an eight-chapter book), there is no technical language. In chapters on economy, demography and a proxemic analysis of ritual there are numbers and diagrams. It is hard to imagine adequately addressing these topics without resorting to a few charts, graphs and figures.

Scheffel also uses my own words to condemn the use of analytical prose and numbers ("numbers are the shadows which events cast, they are not the events themselves, nor should they play a part in the mystification of social life" [p. 202]). I am not opposed to using numbers or figures to understand complex events. The decontextualized quotation was meant to clarify my position on the debate between a Platonic conception of numbers as a priori logical categories and an approach which interprets numbers as a feature of cognition and culture—e.g., as symbolic for both researchers and their subjects (see Thomas Crump, *The Anthropology of Numbers* [Cambridge University Press, 1990]). That I favour the latter view implies much of how I hope demographers might interpret my work and it was "by way of warning off extreme

materialists who still haunt this world with the 'thought' that their materialism itself is not an ideology" (p. 202).

Scheffel says, "it is not for a reviewer to condemn an author for choosing a particular theoretical framework," but does just that by suggesting I should have drawn upon theories of ritual practice employed since the mid-1970s. (He does not reveal what these are.) I noted that my interpretation of rituals in terms of silence and space draws heavily on Stanley Tambiah (*Culture, Thought, and Social Action* [Harvard University Press, 1985]). Hutterian rituals are then situated within the theoretical paradigm of control, culminating in Rappaport's enlarged edition of *Pigs for the Ancestors* ([Yale University Press, 1984], p. 5). The point of departure for the book is the mid-1980s and not a paradigm ending a decade earlier. Finally, the research was done in Alberta (not Saskatchewan).

As for allowing the Hutterians to recede while broader issues of cultural evolution, ritual and population growth are described, I plead guilty. For me that is as much an obligation as the warm depiction of the Hutterians. MacLean, in *Young Men and Fire* (University of Chicago Press, 1985), observed that "one of the chief privileges of man is to speak up for the universe." My attempt to go beyond the borders of Hutterian culture is rooted in the same kind of thinking:

Hopefully . . . something of what the Hutterian People have learned may be passed on outside the borders of their own society and experience. To have created and tenaciously preserved an essentially egalitarian and pacifist culture out of near oblivion is no mean accomplishment. Perhaps the hope such a rare event can inspire may lead to real insight into the rebirth which many of the darkened corners and persecuted peoples of our world have despaired of ever finding. (p. 12)

Surely there is a risk of parochialism in viewing local knowledge strictly in terms of itself. Scheffel appears to suggest that descriptive writing which exudes charm is "good" writing, while attending abstract and analytical topics yields "bad" writing. What are we to make of writing which decontextualizes quotations and casts a work in the wrong place and time? Simple inaccuracy aside, is this not perhaps the tyranny of a new genre supplanting an older one? I object to the tone of Scheffel's remarks which seem intended to paint me as yesterday's ethnographer.

The Nervous System

Michael Taussig

New York: Routledge, Chapman and Hall, 1992. 207 pp. \$56.50 (cloth), \$19.95 (paper)

Reviewer: Christiane Paponnet-Cantat
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The Nervous System by Michael Taussig is, undeniably, a very challenging piece of writing. In order to outline a theory of culture, the author follows a complex procedure and tackles a number of issues such as power, control and the role of ritualization in political discourse. Questioning the commodification of culture in our post-modern world, Professor Taussig argues that the capitalist nature of modern culture is a product of reification by the state, by science and by the people themselves. Taussig reassesses the nature of modern capitalist culture by examining the social body and